

Diachronica

When "something" becomes "a bit"

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Abstract:	This paper analyzes the mechanisms of syntactic and semantic change involved in the development of the degree modifier algo 'a bit' from an indefinite pronoun meaning 'something' in Spanish, from the Medieval to the Classical period. It focuses both on the structural conditions for the reanalysis of the pronoun in pseudo-partitive constructions and on the pragmatic inferences licensed by its quantificational and indefinite meaning. This diachronic development is studied against the background of cross-linguistic tendencies in the distribution of degree modifiers, thus providing a historical perspective on the cross-categorial nature of gradability.
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When *something* becomes *a bit*

1. Introduction

Gradability has become a central topic of study at the syntax-semantics interface at least since the seminal work of Bolinger (1972). In his view, gradability is a semantic notion that is not restricted to adjectives (the prototypical gradable category) but rather a notion that cuts across syntactic categories; manifestations of degree can also be found with nouns and verbs. Recent studies on gradability have focused on analyzing the structure of scales and classifying adjectives according to their scalar properties (Cruse 1986, Rotstein and Winter 2004, Kennedy and McNally 2005; see Demonte 2011 for an overview). The behavior of degree adverbs has proven crucial to this enterprise, as their semantic restrictions provide diagnostics for types of scales and properties of predicates (Paradis 2001, Kennedy and McNally 2005, Amaral 2006b). In the Romance languages, the study of the distribution of degree adverbs can be especially fruitful, as they may combine with different syntactic categories and hence provide insight into the structure of scalar predicates (Doetjes 1997, 2008; Abeillé and Godard 2003, Amaral 2006b). However, the study of the diachrony of degree adverbs has not received as much attention. And yet, certain patterns begin to emerge as we compare the diachrony of degree modifiers across languages. For example, it is common to find nominal categories being recategorized as adverbs. This path is exemplified by the adverb *beaucoup* – from the noun phrase *un beau coup* ‘a good strike’ in French (Marchello-Nizia 2006), the structure NP1 of NP2 like *un montón de N*, *un mogollón de N* ‘a lot of’ in Spanish (Vervecken 2012), *montes de N*, *montanhas de N* ‘a lot of’ in Portuguese (Mendes 2013), *um bocado* ‘a bit’, from the noun *bocado* ‘a portion that fits in the mouth’ in Portuguese, and *a bit (of)* (from the noun meaning ‘a bite’) in English (Traugott 2008, Claridge and Kytö 2014). The source of these adverbs is a construction containing a noun that may denote a certain quantity or amount. These studies have shown that as the whole construction becomes a grammatical unit, the nominal element loses its categorial status and original meaning. However, other nominal elements may undergo this change; this paper addresses the development of a degree modifier from a pronoun, a topic less known in the literature.

Studying the paths of change that lead to the emergence of degree modifiers allows us to gain insight into the manifestations of gradability across syntactic categories and to test

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4 predictions about the distribution of degree modifiers cross-linguistically. Although the
5 manifestations of gradability across syntactic categories have been investigated from a
6 synchronic point of view (for example by Bolinger 1972, Paradis 2001, among others), the
7 creation of degree modifiers has not been analyzed under this perspective. A diachronic approach
8 allows us to study changes in the combinatorial properties of a lexical item as it acquires a
9 degree interpretation over time. Furthermore, the diachronic approach makes it possible to
10 observe the manifestations of gradability in the grammar as they interact with specific
11 constructions in a given language.
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19 In this paper, the focus is on the diachrony of the degree adverb *algo*, meaning ‘a bit, a
20 little’ in the history of Spanish, in order to investigate the conditions under which the degree
21 interpretation arises. In particular, this paper analyzes the relation between the morphosyntactic
22 and semantic properties of the indefinite pronoun with inanimate reference *algo* ‘something’, as
23 in (1), and the emergence of the degree adverb, exemplified in (2), in specific constructions.¹ In
24 this paper, I will focus on the change from the Medieval to the Classical period (following the
25 division proposed by Lapesa 1981).
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33 (1) ...puede el medico estonce **algo** fazer (Corpus del Español, 1200s)²
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35 ‘Then the physician can do something...’
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39 (2) La mar también fue **algo** alterada (CdE, 1400s)
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41 ‘The sea was also a bit agitated.’
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47 ¹ Sánchez López (1999) distinguishes between the pronominal use of *algo*, which belongs to the
48 “Not universal indefinite pronouns”, in particular to the class of existential quantifiers, and the
49 adverbial use, within the “Cuantificadores de grado (Degree quantifiers)”, as a proportional
50 quantifier (on a par with *todo*, as in “Es todo fuerza”, and *nada*, as in “No es nada útil”). The
51 same division is adopted in the historical study of quantifiers in Spanish by Camus Bergareche
52 (2009).
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54 ² The examples presented in the paper were extracted from the Corpus del Español, a corpus of
55 100 million words (as of September 2015), which contains more than 20,000 Spanish texts
56 spanning from the 1200s to the 1900s. The corpus is referred to in the text as CdE and is
57 available at <http://www.corpusdelespanol.org/>. Some additional examples are from Müller
58 (1987), as indicated in the text. The orthography presented is reproduced as it appears in the
59 sources.
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Both in the historical texts and in contemporary Spanish the two categories can be distinguished on the basis of morpho-syntactic criteria. As a pronoun, *algo* can be modified by adjectives, in which case the adjective agrees in gender and number with the pronoun (e.g. *encontré algo bueno*). This behavior contrasts with that of the adverb, which does not trigger agreement and can only be substituted by other degree modifiers; accordingly, in (2), agreement is between the adjective *alterada* and the noun *mar*. The indefinite pronoun can be anaphoric to an entity or proposition previously introduced in the discourse. As an adverb, *algo* can roughly be paraphrased as ‘a bit, a little’ (and thus can be substituted by *un poco*) and it may not refer to a previously introduced entity or proposition.

The goals of this paper are twofold. First, it aims to show the factors that played a role in the diachronic development of *algo* to a degree modifier; I claim that we have a combination of structural and pragmatic factors. I will focus on the syntactic-semantic conditions as well as on the pragmatic inferences associated with indefinite pronouns cross-linguistically, and in particular associated with the *alg*-series of indefinite pronouns in Ibero-Romance (Haspelmath 1997, Malkiel 1948). Second, the paper investigates whether collocations with specific lexical categories have a privileged role in the emergence of *algo* as a degree modifier. Do the historical data of the development of *algo* confirm the status of adjectives as the prototypical gradable category? As theoretical background, I will use the model proposed by Doetjes (2008) regarding the distribution of degree modifiers. Although Doetjes’ model of the behavior of degree adverbs cross-linguistically is synchronic, it is possible to investigate whether the continuum of syntactic categories corresponds to the expansion of the combinatorial possibilities of degree adverbs over time, i.e. whether the synchronic continuum of categories has a historical counterpart.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In sections 2 and 3, I present some of the properties of the indefinite pronoun and the degree adverb that will be relevant for the historical analysis. Section 4 introduces the diachronic data and presents the analysis of the change. Section 5 discusses the findings in light of the theoretical proposals considered and summarizes the main contributions of this paper.

2. Properties of the indefinite pronoun

The form *algo* (from Vulgar Latin *aliquid* ‘something’) belongs to a series of indefinite pronominal forms derived from the *ali*-series in Latin (Haspelmath 1997, Malkiel 1948). Within the *alg*-series in Ibero-Romance, *algo* is the only form with inanimate reference; it may refer to an object, an event or a proposition.

The pronouns in the *alg*- series (*algún*, *alguien*) differ from the indefinite pronoun *uno* in that they trigger a quantity implicature by virtue of participating in a Horn scale formed by existential, universal and proportional quantifiers (Gutiérrez-Rexach 2010: 689). This scale of quantificational expressions is given in (3):

- (3) <todo ‘everything’, la mayoría ‘the most part’, algo ‘something’>

In this scale, each term unilaterally entails all the terms to its right and conversationally implicates the negation of the terms to its left. So, in the absence of further information, by using *algo* the speaker implicates that neither ‘the most part’ nor ‘everything’ holds, as represented in (4) (where the symbol +> means ‘conversationally implicates’).³ In this paper, I will explore this quantity implicature and the role that it has played in the reanalysis and recategorization of *algo*.

- (4) algo +> ‘something, not the most part, and not everything’ (Quantity-based implicature)

As other indefinite expressions with existential meaning, this series systematically triggers a set of pragmatic implications, among which an “ignorance implicature” pertaining to the identity of the referent of the pronoun (Aguilar-Guevara et al. 2010). The set of semantic and pragmatic implications regularly associated with *algo* are exemplified in (5).

- (5) He visto algo en la carretera.
‘I have seen something on the road.’

³ This Quantity-based implicature is a generalized conversational implicature (GCI), i.e. it is an inference produced as a convention of use. Since GCIs are systematic and not contextually-dependent inferences, it is generally assumed that GCIs are the type of content that may eventually become part of the coded meaning of an expression (Levinson 1995, Traugott 2005).

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4 a. Semantic content: The speaker has seen at least one thing on the road.
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6 b. Pragmatic content (ignorance implicature): The speaker does not know or does not
7 want to commit to the identity of what she/he has seen.
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11 While the semantic content of *algo* is that of an existential quantifier, i.e. it means ‘at least one’,
12 the pragmatic implications just described may arise systematically in the contexts in which the
13 pronoun is used, and thus may eventually become conventionalized. Like other indefinite
14 pronouns, *algo* is “intrinsically uninformative” (Haspelmath 1997: 187), which explains the
15 systematic inferences triggered by its use. This paper pursues the idea that the diachronic change
16 at the origin of the degree adverb *algo* ‘a bit’ results both from the quantificational meaning of
17 the pronoun, enriched by pragmatic inferences regularly associated with indefinite pronouns, and
18 properties of the constructions in which *algo* occurs, as evidenced by corpus data. Before we
19 look at the historical data, I briefly present the properties of the degree adverb that constitute the
20 endpoint of the change under consideration, and how its combinatorial properties fit within
21 patterns of behavior of degree modifiers across languages.
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33 **3. Properties of the degree adverb**

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37 In contemporary Spanish, like other degree modifiers, *algo* is compatible with gradable
38 adjectives but not with non-gradable adjectives like *digital* ‘digital’ (cf. Demonte 2011):
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- 42 (6) *un reloj muy/un poco/algo digital
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44 a watch very/a bit/a bit digital
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48 As for gradable adjectives, *algo* shows sensitivity to the properties of the scales expressed by the
49 adjectives, as shown by the acceptability of (7) and the contrast in acceptability between the
50 adjectives in (8). Two properties of scales are of relevant for the distribution of degree modifiers:
51 the structure of the scale and the type of standard of comparison (Kennedy and McNally, 2005).
52 According to the former, a scale may be open, if it lacks both a minimum and a maximum value
53 (e.g. *expensive*, *interesting*), it may be closed, if it has both a minimum and a maximum value
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(e.g. *full*, *empty*), or it may be partially closed if only either the minimum or the maximum value is contained in the scale (lower-closed: e.g. *wet*, upper-closed: e.g. *dry*).⁴

(7) objeto algo {caro, interesante}

‘a little {expensive, interesting} object’ [Open scale adjectives]

(8) ropa algo {sucia, ??limpia}

‘a little {dirty, ??clean} clothes’ [Closed scale adjectives: *dirty* is lower-closed, *clean* is upper-closed]

With respect to the standard of comparison, not all gradable adjectives are equally context-dependent. The standard may be contextually determined (in the case of relative adjectives), or it may be lexically encoded; in the latter case, the lexical meaning of the adjective includes an inherent standard (absolute adjectives). Absolute adjectives may be total predicates, i.e. they are true of an object if it has a maximal degree of the relevant property, or partial predicates, which are true of an object if it has some degree of the property, as exemplified by the pair *clean/dirty* (Rotstein and Winter 2004). *Algo* may co-occur either with relative adjectives, like *caro* ‘expensive’, or, for absolute adjectives, it can only modify the partial adjective of the pair (*sucio* ‘dirty’), not the total one, i.e. the one that denotes the total absence of the antonymic property (*limpio* ‘clean’). As a modifier of gradable adjectives, *algo* requires scales that are either lower bound (as in *sucio*) or open (e.g. *caro*, *interesante*). As will be shown below (Section 4.4), these types of adjectival scales can be found in the data in the early examples of adjectival modification.

⁴ The four types of scales can be represented as follows (D being the set of degrees, R being the ordering relation on the degrees and Δ the scalar dimension), following Kennedy and McNally (2005):

- a. $\langle D_{(0,1)}, R, \Delta \rangle$ (TOTALLY) OPEN SCALE
- b. $\langle D_{[0,1)}, R, \Delta \rangle$ LOWER CLOSED SCALE
- c. $\langle D_{(0,1]}, R, \Delta \rangle$ UPPER CLOSED SCALE
- d. $\langle D_{[0,1]}, R, \Delta \rangle$ (TOTALLY) CLOSED SCALE

In contemporary Spanish *algo* may also modify other syntactic categories besides adjectives, hence showing a combinatorial flexibility typical of “Class 2 degree expressions” (Neeleman et al. (2004)). This class of adverbs has the following properties:

- (i) besides co-occurring with adjectives, Class-2 expressions attach to prepositional, verbal and nominal categories: e.g. *apreciar algo el estudio* ‘to enjoy study a bit’, *algo de agua* ‘a bit of water’, *comida algo sin gusto* ‘food that lacks taste a bit’.
- (ii) Class-2 expressions may appear without a gradable predicate (e.g. *mentalidad algo cartesiana* ‘a somewhat Cartesian mentality’);⁵
- (iii) Class-2 expressions are ordered more freely with respect to the expression modified than Class-1 expressions;
- (iv) some of the Class-2 expressions have internal syntactic structure (e.g. the degree modifier *a bit* is a DP) (Neeleman et al. 2004: 21).

Neeleman et al. (2004) propose that this class of degree terms does not select for a specific type of phrase, but rather combines freely with any type of phrase that meets its semantic requirements. In the terms of the authors (within the Minimalist framework), Class-2 adverbs are not functional heads. This is captured by the structure in (9), from Neeleman et al. (2004: 21):

$$(9) \quad [XP \text{ [DegP algo] } [XP]]^6$$

⁵ The adjective *Cartesian* does not express a scalar property, and hence an expression like *algo cartesiana* cannot have a scalar interpretation. Rather, this expression means that the predicate *Cartesian* applies in some way, but the speaker is not in a condition, or does not want to commit entirely, to predicating this property of the argument without reservations. This may be because the predicate does not have a precise meaning (i.e. it is “epistemically vague” in Sauerland and Stateva’s 2007 terms) or because the speaker is not entirely certain about using it. Here, *algo* behaves as an “epistemic less certain approximator” (Sauerland and Stateva 2007). For this reason, I am translating the Spanish example as ‘somewhat Cartesian’. I will leave the treatment of such examples for further work.

⁶ The authors point out that in this representation, the label “DegP” is not essential, and that other labels, like “EvalP” (evaluative phrase), could be used. The main point of this representation is the fact that the degree word may modify any syntactic category and displays greater syntactic flexibility (as shown for example by the possibility of occurring in different positions) than Class 1 degree words (e.g. English *very*).

In this paper, I aim to investigate how *algo* becomes a modifier with these properties, i.e. a degree adverb that may occur with any type of phrase, considering that *algo* started life as the head of a nominal phrase. A related question is whether the historical development of *algo* as a degree modifier shows an expansion of its combinatorial properties with different categories over time.

In order to investigate these questions, it is necessary to begin by considering the distribution of degree modifiers across languages in order to identify patterns that may underlie a typology of this class of words.

3.1 The distribution of degree expressions cross-linguistically

Although the compatibility with (gradable) adjectives is generally assumed a diagnostic for gradability, degree expressions may also modify other syntactic categories. Building on this observation, Doetjes (2008) proposes that the distributional patterns of degree modifiers across languages are predictable; they form a continuum of categories, adjectives being situated at one end of this continuum. She formulates the following prediction: when a degree modifier is compatible with a category on one end of this continuum, it will only be compatible with a category on the other end of the continuum if it is also compatible with the categories in between. That is to say, the compatibility of degree modifiers with different categories is not random, but rather can be explained by the properties of the different categories with respect to scale structure. Adjacent categories on the continuum share scalar properties. This continuum is represented in Table 2 (a reproduction of Table 6.2 in Doetjes 2008).

I	gradable adjectives (adverbs)	Type A <i>very</i> (English)	Type B <i>erg</i> (Dutch)	Type C	très (French)	
Ia	gradable nominal predicates			<i>trop</i> (French) <i>less</i> (English)	↓ ↓	
Iib	gradable verbs	Type D <i>beaucoup</i>		<i>minder</i>		Type 0

III	eventive verbs, eventive adjectives, comparatives	(French)	Type E <i>veel</i> (Dutch)	(Dutch)		
IV	mass nouns				Type F <i>a mountain</i> (English)	Type 0
V	plural nouns					Type G <i>many</i> (English)

Table 2. The degree expression continuum (from Doetjes 2008: 138).

Doetjes proposes a typology of degree expressions consistent with this continuum, including types of modifiers predicted not to exist (e.g. modifiers that are compatible only with gradable verbs or with mass nouns, represented by the grey slots in the table). For example, the English adverb *very* is a Type A modifier, i.e. a modifier that combines only with adjectives. Type C expressions, on the other hand, tend to combine with all the categories on the continuum. This type of expressions seems to be restricted in English and Dutch but are more common in the Romance languages, as exemplified by the modifiers *muito* ‘very, much/many’ in Portuguese and *demasiado* ‘too (much/many)’ in Spanish and Portuguese (Doetjes 2008: 128).

On the basis of the distribution presented above, in contemporary Spanish *algo* is a Type C modifier since, as we saw in the previous section, it may co-occur with all the categories in the table. However, *algo* is not compatible with plural nouns, unlike other Type C modifiers. This restriction seems to be shared with a whole “class of small amount expressions” like English *a bit* or French *un peu* (Doetjes 2008: 129) and hence is not exclusive to *algo*.

From a diachronic point of view, the questions to be addressed are the following: what are the mechanisms through which the pronominal form *algo* undergoes recategorization and becomes a modifier with the syntactic properties described above? How does the distribution of *algo* as a pronoun relate to the distribution of the emerging adverbial category? And do the mechanisms by which this change takes place provide any insight into the relation between the categories on the continuum?

These questions will be addressed as follows. First, I present some background on the categorial status of *algo* in medieval and classical Spanish. Then I focus on the pronominal uses

and the occurrence of *algo* in partitive and pseudo-partitive constructions in both periods of the history of Spanish. After presenting the properties of these constructions, I analyze the classes of nouns found in pseudo-partitive constructions and relate them to the properties of adjectives and verbs that can be modified by *algo* in the 1400s.

4. The diachronic data

4. 1 The categorial change: from nominal to adverbial

A comparison between the corpus data from the 1200s-1300s (Archaic or Medieval Spanish) and the 1400s-1500s (Classical Spanish) shows that the first unambiguous instances of the adverb are from the Classical period, specifically from the 1400s. In the 1200s-1300s, *algo* is found either as a noun meaning ‘possessions, riches’⁷, as can be seen by the translations of (10) and (11), or as an indefinite pronoun.

- (10) Auía en Babilonia vn mercador muy rrico e bueno [...] E auía muchos algos (Müller 1987, [c 1250?] Donz Teodor p. 76, 1016)

‘There was in Babilon a very rich and good merchant. And he had many possessions.’

- (11) El algo que da la muger al marido por razón de casamiento es llamado dote” (CdE, 1200s)

‘The possessions that the wife gives to the husband by marriage are called the dowry’

The corpus data show that *algo* had the distributional properties of a noun: it could be inflected for number, as in (10), it could be preceded by a determiner, as in (11) and (12), and it could co-occur with adjectives (e.g. *gran(d)*, *buen*), as in (13). As shown in (12), *algo* could also appear in a coordinated structure with other nouns:

⁷ As a noun, it can be paraphrased by ‘don, bien’. This can be shown by examples with coordination, e.g. “algos y otros bienes”, found in the corpus (see a full example in (100)). Müller (1987) provides the following definitions for the noun: ‘bienes o valores inmuebles o muebles: dinero, riqueza(s), objeto(s) de valor’, ‘ganancia, provecho’, ‘pompa, lujo’. This value is arguably related to the expression *valer algo* ‘gozar de gran estimación y prestigio; ser persona de calidad’ as well as the compound noun *fijo d’algo* (*fidalgo*) ‘noble man’.

(12) njn la su heredat njn el su algo njn la su muger njn la su fija
'nor his land nor his possessions nor his wife nor his daughter'

(13) ganaron daquela tierra grand algo sin cuenta. (1200s)
'(they) earned of that land great countless riches'

Another example in which it is preceded by a determiner (e.g. *este, el, otro*) is given in (14):

(14) Aquella noche mesma el rico fue ahogado; el algo que tenía dexó le muy mal logrado
'On that night the rich man drowned: the possessions he had put him in a bad position'

Finally, it could also co-occur with indefinite quantifiers (e.g. *quanto, mucho*), as in (15) and (16):

(15) Otrosy conuiene al Rey de auer muchas Riquezas & mucho algo para defender su Reyno
(1200s)
'By the same token, the king should have many riches and many possessions in order to defend his kingdom'

(16) E tanto algo non fue de troya lleuado (1300s)
'And so many possessions [as the ones just mentioned] were not taken out of Troy'

Examples containing *algo* both as a noun and a pronoun can be found in the same text; the two instances are underlined in (16):

(16) La va. propiedat del perujfico es que sienpre despense con tristeza y con dolor, ca tiene que los algos o los bienes de fuera del cuerpo le son asy encorporados que sy los partiese de sy cuydaria que le tajauan algo de su cuerpo, e porende quando da semejal que le sacan las entrañas del cuerpo.” (CdE, 1200s)

'The fifth property of the stingy man is that (he) always spends money with sadness and pain, as for him his external possessions and goods are so dear to him (literally, embodied) that if he they were separated from him/taken away from him he would think that a part of his body was being cut, and for this reason, every time he gives (something), it seems that his bowels are being removed'

The first instance of *algo* in (16) is the noun, as shown by number inflection and the coordination with another noun phrase (*los bienes de fuera del cuerpo*), and the second instance is the indefinite pronoun, ‘something’. The latter will be discussed below in more detail.

Starting in the 1400s, we find unambiguous instances of *algo* as an adverb, as shown by its morpho-syntactic properties. In (17)-(20), *algo* is an invariable word and it could be substituted by another degree modifier (like *un poco*).⁸ Here, the distribution clearly differs from that of a pronoun.

(17) ay un gran río algo angosto, (CdE, 1400s)
 there.is a big river *algo* narrow
 ‘There is a big river, a bit narrow’

(18) La mar también fue algo alterada (CdE, 1400s)
 the sea also was *algo* agitated
 ‘The sea was also a bit agitated’

(19) afloxó la noche algo el viento. (CdE, 1400s)
 calmed the night *algo* the wind
 ‘The night calmed the wind a bit’

(20) Acercáronse algo, y después venían arredrados del navío (CdE, 1400s)
 Came-close *algo* and then came distant from-the ship
 ‘They came closer a bit, and then (they) came, keeping a distance from the ship’

⁸ Müller cites an adverbial use of *algo* as a modifier of a verb found in the 14th century, and interprets it as meaning ‘bastante, mucho’:

(i) [a 1330?] Leyes Moros p. 138: et que desnuden al omen sus vestidos; et non la desnuden á la mujer, mas que la quiten tantos de sus vestidos porque syent algo de los açotes. ‘and that the clothes of the men should be removed, but not those of the women, but that enough of the clothes of the women be removed so that they feel *algo* the whips’.

This value is only found in this period and is not found elsewhere in the CdE. Bolinger mentions a similar interpretation of English *a little* and *a bit*, which in his view is triggered by inference and is restricted to “unfavorable (largely negative), conditional, and desiderative contexts” (Bolinger 1972: 50). The examples provided by Bolinger suggest a pragmatic mechanism akin to irony.

In (17) and (18), *algo* modifies an adjectival predicate, and there is agreement in both examples between the adjective and the subject of the sentence (*río angosto*, *mar alterada*). In examples (19) and (20) *algo* modifies the verb; in (19), the direct object of the verb *aflojar* is *el viento* ‘the wind’, hence *algo* can only be analyzed as modifying the (gradable) verb, not as a possible direct object, and in (20) the verb is intransitive.

To sum up, the data from the 1200s-1500s allow us to identify three categories. As a noun, *algo* may be pluralized, it may co-occur with determiners and undergo adjectival modification (e.g. *grand algo*, *grandes algos*). On the other hand, as a pronoun, *algo* can be modified by adjectives, in which case the adjective agrees in gender and number with the pronoun (e.g. *algo bueno*). The indefinite pronoun can be anaphoric to an entity or proposition previously introduced in the discourse. Finally, as an adverb *algo* does not trigger agreement and can only be substituted by other degree modifiers. As an adverb, *algo* can roughly be paraphrased as ‘a bit, a little’ and it may not refer to a previously introduced entity or proposition. The properties associated with each category are summarized in Table 1.

	Agreement	Substitution	Anaphoric
NOUN	Yes (Det, Adj)	<i>don(es)</i> , <i>bienes</i>	No
INDEFINITE PRONOUN	Yes (Adj)	<i>alguna cosa</i>	Yes
DEGREE ADVERB	No	by degree modifiers (e.g. <i>un poco</i>)	No

Table 1- Tests for the categorial classification of *algo*.

In this section we have observed that in the medieval period *algo* displayed either the combinatorial properties of a noun or a pronoun, and that in the 1400s we begin to find occurrences that instantiate the distribution of a degree modifier. These data suggest that by the 1400s *algo* has been reanalyzed as a member of a different syntactic category.

4. 2 Structural conditions for the reanalysis of *algo* as a degree modifier

Before we move on, we should clarify the concept of reanalysis. Syntactic reanalysis is often associated with surface ambiguity and involves reorganization of linguistic elements (Timberlake 1977, Harris and Campbell 1995). It is a mechanism of change that occurs if two interpretations of a sequence, corresponding to two structural analyses, are possible in a certain context. In other words, for reanalysis to take place it must be the case that the linguistic string may be analyzed according to a former structure and according to a new structure⁹. Although the motivations of syntactic reanalysis are often not discussed in the literature, instances of this mechanism suggest a close link to semantic change, driven by an enriched interpretation of the conventional meaning of the older construction (Traugott and Dasher 2005). This is the perspective that will be adopted in this paper. Hence, reanalysis involves a change in syntactic-semantic composition, i.e. it results from a change in the combinatorial properties of a lexical item or an expression (Eckardt 2006). Crucially, reanalysis does not happen to a lexical item in isolation; rather, it takes place within a specific construction (cf. Harris and Campbell 1995, Eckardt 2006, among others).

Reanalysis involves change in constituency, change in hierarchical structure and category labels (Harris and Campbell 1995). Since it is a silent process, it can only be detected when there is surface evidence that the (initially covert) new analysis has taken place. Hence, the reanalysis of *algo* as a degree modifier is only observable through a change of its distribution, when *algo* begins to occur as a modifier of adjectival and verbal predicates (as in [17]-[20] above), i.e. in collocations that are incompatible with the distribution of nominal categories, hence ruling out its pronominal classification.

On the other hand, there are contexts in which the distribution of the pronoun and the adverb overlap; at the surface level, in certain sentences there are no morphosyntactic cues¹⁰ to

⁹ It is important to point out that “new” does not necessarily mean a previously non-existent structure in the language, but rather a new analysis for the construction under consideration. There has been some debate in the literature as to whether reanalysis requires the creation of a new structure (see Harris and Campbell 1995: chapter 5). As will be shown below, in the case of *algo* there is evidence for the existence of the relevant structure involved in the reanalysis in Spanish (Keniston 1937, Camus Bergareche 2009: 921-922) but this structure is innovative with *algo*.

¹⁰ The loss of syntactic cues to categorial classification arguably played an important role in this change. Note that in nominal uses of *algo* like (i) the co-occurrence with an adjective provided a morpho-syntactic cue that supported its classification as a noun:

(i) lo daras grand algo de tu aver (CdE, 1200s)

unambiguously distinguish between the two categories. In these constructions *algo* can be interpreted either as a pronoun or as a degree modifier, depending on the structural analysis (to be precise, in this case, the modifier would be the sequence *algo de*). In this respect, there is some similarity between *algo* and nouns like *grano*, *pedazo*, *trozo*, *vaso*, as in *pedazo de papel*, *vaso de agua*. This class of nouns, called by Bosque (1999) “nombres acotadores”, consists of nouns that take mass nouns as their complement and can receive either a referential interpretation or a measure interpretation. When these nouns receive a referential interpretation, as made apparent by verb selection (e.g. *Rompió una taza de café* ‘(He/she) broke a cup of coffee’), they are considered to be the head of the phrase in which they occur and the second noun is treated as a noun complement. On the other hand, when they are used as quantifiers, the second noun is the head of the construction, e.g. in *He tomado una taza de café* ‘I’ve had a cup of coffee’, in which *café* is the object of the verb and *taza* provides a measure for the amount of coffee ingested.¹¹

Crucially, *algo* can never receive a referential interpretation; it cannot denote an object that is unambiguously selected by a verb (unlike *taza*), as it has inanimate reference and functions as a quantifier. However, there is a set of constructions in which the same structural ambiguity described for these nouns can be found with *algo*: either it may be analyzed as the head of the nominal phrase and it denotes a part of a whole, or the second noun of the construction may be the head of the phrase, in which case *algo de* is analyzed as a degree modifier. The distinction between these two analyses, corresponding to two different constructions in their syntactic and semantic properties, is detailed in the next section.

4.3 *Algo* in partitive and pseudo-partitive constructions

There is historical evidence for the lack of unambiguous morpho-syntactic cues for the categorial classification of *algo* as a nominal expression. This structural ambiguity created the conditions for the possible reanalysis of *algo* as a degree modifier. In the corpus data from the Medieval and Classical periods, we find a common collocation, in which *algo* is followed by a PP headed by *de*, as in (21).

¹¹ These examples are adapted from Martí y Girbau (2010: 99).

(21) [DP *algo* [PP de DP]]

Crucially, this collocation corresponds to two different constructions with *algo* in these periods: a partitive construction and a pseudo-partitive construction.¹² The distinction between the syntactic and semantic properties of partitives and pseudo-partitives (Selkirk 1977, Milner 1978) is relevant in the reanalysis and recategorization undergone by *algo*. I will start out by distinguishing the properties of these constructions, adopting Milner's (1978: 62) description of the structure of partitives, with the modifications proposed by Martí I Girbau (Martí I Girbau 2010). Partitive constructions have the following properties:

(22)

- a. A two-part structure joined by *of* (*de*),
- b. The first part is an element of quantity not preceded by the definite article,
- c. The second part is a noun with a proper determiner,¹³
- d. This determiner is always definite,
- e. A particular semantic interpretation: the element of quantity quantifies a subset of a set denoted by the noun or nominal phrase in the second part.

Semantically, a partitive structure receives a part-whole interpretation (see also Hoeksema 1996) and accordingly contains two referential expressions, i.e. the head and the coda of the partitive construction. On the other hand, in pseudo-partitives the coda is not introduced by a definite determiner, and the phrase constitutes one referential expression. This difference is exemplified in (23)a-b, from Brucart (1997: 162, examples (8)a-b):

- (23) a. [SD_i una parte de [SD_j los senadores]]
b. [SD_i un grupo de senadores]

¹² Camus Bergareche and Pérez Saldanya point out that *algun*, *molt* and *poc* in Catalan (having developed from adjectives in Latin) also occur as heads of partitive constructions, and consider the ability to head partitive structures to be the defining feature of this class of determiners as “canonical quantifiers” (Camus Bergareche and Pérez Saldanya 2011: 242).

¹³ (22)b will be called the “head of the partitive” and (22)c will be called the “coda of the partitive” (following Brucart 1997).

As shown in (23)a, the partitive construction contains two nominal phrases with independent referential status. This is not the case for the pseudo-partitive in (23)b, where the coda introduces a property, i.e. the expression refers to a set of individuals who have the property of being senators. At the syntactic level, the distinction between the two constructions can be shown by a number of tests, for example, the coda of the partitive construction can be extraposed, while the coda of the pseudo-partitive cannot. Additionally, with partitives it is possible to have relative clauses anaphorically referring to either set (i.e. i or j), while there is no ambiguity with a relative clause added to (23b) since there is only one potential antecedent.¹⁴ For this reason, at the semantic level the pseudo-partitive does not contribute a part-whole relation, and Milner (1978) proposes to call it a quantitative expression.¹⁵ In the corpus data, we see that *algo* may participate in both constructions given its quantificational nature but the interpretation obtained is different in each case due to the different syntactic and semantic configurations.

At the structural level, there have been several proposals that try to capture the differences between partitives and pseudo-partitives (see Brucart 1997 for an overview). For our purposes, the crucial difference is that in partitives the quantifier is the head of the whole construction (in Selkirk's analysis of partitives, the coda is the complement of the quantificational expression). In the pseudo-partitive construction, on the other hand, the noun in the coda is the head of the phrase. With respect to *algo*, while in the partitive constructions with *algo* the pronoun is the head of the nominal phrase, in the pseudo-partitives the bare noun is the head of the phrase and the sequence *algo de* can be reanalyzed as a modifier of the head noun, and this analysis is compatible with the degree interpretation.

¹⁴ An example of this distinction is (i) and (ii), from Brucart (1997: 164):

(i) La mitad de los locutores, que se habían negado a leer la noticia ante las cámaras, fueron despedidos. (Partitive),

(ii) Un grupo de locutores, que se habían negado a leer la noticia ante las cámaras, fueron despedidos. (Pseudopartitive)

While (i) is ambiguous in admitting both the interpretation according to which half of the speakers refused to read the news in front of the cameras and all of them did, (ii) is not ambiguous since there is only one possible antecedent for the relative pronoun.

¹⁵ "(...) alors que les tours partitifs consistent à circonscrire un sous-ensemble dans un ensemble *déterminé*, les tours quantitatifs circonscrivent un sous-ensemble dans un ensemble *indéterminé*, c'est-à-dire en fait la classe maximale dénotée par le nom." (Milner 1978: 66).

In order to study the properties of these constructions in the relevant period, I extracted examples of *algo de* followed by a noun, for medieval and classical Spanish, from the CdE.¹⁶ Given that the number of instances from the 1200s and 1300s is reduced, I have grouped them together, and I compare the data of both centuries with that of the Classical period, in order to assess whether there is an evolution. Out of the 35 occurrences of *algo de* with a noun in the 1200s-1300s, 29 are instances of the partitive construction, i.e. the noun in the coda is introduced either by a definite article or a possessive, and six exemplify the pseudo-partitive construction. In this construction we find the bare nouns *membrança*, *onra*, *letras*, *mueble*, *heredad/heredat* (occurring twice). It should be pointed out that bare nouns were more frequent in old Spanish than in Classical or contemporary Spanish (Company 1991). This is relevant for the interpretation obtained in the construction with *algo*; in the expressions *algo de mueble*,¹⁷ *algo de heredad* we must assume a part-whole interpretation with the bare nouns ('part of the mobile goods' and 'part of the land') despite the fact that formally we do not have a partitive

¹⁶ The search on the CdE was for collocates of *algo de* with the syntactic category "Noun", with a minimum frequency of 1. Because of the selection of the category in the collocates, examples with a pronominal, anaphoric coda, which are also partitive, were not counted:

(i) e si fincare algo dello que non sea tollido; pongangelo otra uez. (Libro de las animalias)

In (i), there is anaphoric reference to one of the sets that the expression refers to (the one denoting the whole).

The examples were then manually checked. For example, instances of *aver* (e.g. in *algo de su aver*) were added since these did not come up in the search as nouns. The main difficulty of the search in this study is that the preposition *de* is a polyfunctional category as it conflates multiple functions from Latin constructions, so this manual checking is necessary to exclude other interpretations, e.g. *de* meaning 'about'. for example 'about', as in (ii):

(ii) El sueño despues de acabada la digestion: significa algo de cosas venideras. 'about things to come' (1400s)

(iii) Quando llegaredes uos al Rey. & uos preguntare algo de uuestra uida. dezid le que sodes pastores (1200s)

Other instances that were excluded are those in which *de* introduces an argument of the verb, as in

(iv) a reębir algo de su debdor (1200s)

Some instances with *en* show that it was used with values similar to *de*:

(v) E otrossi sabie algo en musica; de manera que cantaua alegre mientre & con cordura. (1200, Estoria de Espanna I.)

¹⁷ The word *mueble* could be interpreted both as an adjective and as a noun, but here is probably a noun due to the coordination with the noun *heredat*. Alonso Pedraz (1986) provides the following definition: "Adj. s. XIII-XV Dícese de la hacienda o bienes que se pueden mover. Usado también como sustantivo".

construction. For the 1400s, there were 65 instances of *algo de* followed by a noun, and in the 1500s, 195 instances of *algo de* followed by a noun.¹⁸ Note that nouns have greater restrictions than adjectives or verbs in their compatibility with degree modifiers, since they often have specific quantifiers that must agree with the noun and often induce quantity rather than degree interpretations (Demonte 2014). For this reason, the compatibility of *algo* with nouns in partitive and pseudo-partitive constructions depends on the semantics of the nouns, as will become clear in the next section.

The distinction between partitive and pseudo-partitive constructions presented above allows us to analyze the corpus examples in the two periods. In (24) – (26), we have instances of the partitive construction. The examples meet all the criteria in (22): the second part of the structure contains a noun with a definite determiner (*su cuerpo*, *el viso*, *su soldada*), and the whole structure receives a part-whole interpretation:

- (24) ...cuydaria que le tajauan algo de su cuerpo (CdE, 1200s)
‘(he) would think that they were cutting (some) part of his body’
- (25) et sil minguare algo del uiso (CdE, 1200s)
‘and if (some) part of the face is missing’
- (26) et si el sennor ouiere dado algo de su soldada. (CdE, 1200s)
‘and if the lord has given a part of his stipend’

As pointed out by Brucart (1997), an expression may be partitive due to either the lexical properties of its elements (i.e. nouns meaning ‘part’, ‘half’, etc.) or syntactic properties of the whole construction. In the case of *algo*, its semantic value of an existential quantifier combined with the systematic implications associated with this series of indefinites, as discussed in section 2, yields a quantificational interpretation. To exemplify, the combination of semantic and pragmatic values (i.e. the quantity and the ignorance implicatures) of *algo* contribute to the partitive meaning of example (24), as detailed in (24’):

¹⁸ Given the low numbers found in the data, I will not be making any claims about frequency or statistical significance of the results. I will present percentages of collocations with different classes of nouns only with a descriptive purpose.

(24') *tajar algo de su cuerpo* +>

cut a part, but not all of his body (Quantity implicature) &

cut some part, whose identity the speaker does not know or is not relevant for the purposes of the exchange (Ignorance implicature)

It is apparent from the context of (24) (given in full in [16] above) that the speaker intends to refer to *any* part of the body; the text characterizes the stingy man as someone so attached to material goods that he cherishes these as much as parts of his own body. For this reason, there is no specific reference to the identity of any of those parts. In examples (24)-(26), *algo* means 'a part of', i.e. it denotes a part of the whole denoted by the noun in the coda. In the corpus it is possible to find examples in which the part-whole interpretation of the partitive is made explicit by the whole passage, as in (27):

(27) ...quando las cortan todas o algo dellas (CdE, 1200s)

'when they cut them entirely or some part of them...'

Additionally, the diagnostics of the partitive construction can be applied. In these structures, both the head and the coda are referential expressions, hence it is possible to anaphorically refer to them, as in (28):

(28) & aprender algo de los tiempos_i & de las cosas que en ellos_i acaescieran. (General historia, 13 c.)

'and learn something of the times and the things that took place in them'.

In (28), the pronoun *ellos* anaphorically refers to the noun *tiempos*, the coda of the partitive construction.

On the other hand, in the 1400s-1500s, 58% of the examples with *algo de* instantiate the pseudo-partitive construction: the noun in the coda is not introduced by a definite determiner, but rather is a bare noun (*duda*, *suavidad*, *dulzura* in [29] and [30]). Accordingly, the structure does not have a part-whole interpretation but rather an interpretation of degree:

(29) *fabula se dize la historia que tiene algo de duda* (CdE, 1400s)

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4 'Fabula is the name of the story that has some element of doubt/has a bit of doubt'
5
6

7 (30) el deleyte...tiene algo de suavidad y de dulçura (CdE, 1400s)
8

9 'pleasure has something smooth and sweet/has a bit of smoothness and sweetness'
10
11

12 The nouns in (29) and (30) introduce a property that may be predicated to a greater or lesser
13 degree, and the examples could be easily paraphrased by the corresponding adjectives (*algo*
14 *dudoso* in [29] and *algo suave y dulce* in [30]).
15
16

17 A classification of the nouns found in the pseudo-partitive constructions is complex given
18 the different dimensions along which nouns may be classified (see Bosque 1999 for a thorough
19 overview). One may assume first that what is common to these examples is that they contain
20 abstract nouns that denote qualities; the properties that they denote are measured in degrees (i.e.
21 they are gradable properties). Additionally, on morphological grounds, several of these nouns are
22 deadjectival or deverbal nouns ending in *-ura*, *-ancia*, *-anza*, a criterion for the identification of
23 abstract nouns mentioned since Bello (Bosque 1999: 46) However, as pointed out by Bosque
24 (1999), the notion of "abstract noun" is elusive and cross-cuts other semantic classifications for
25 which there is independent evidence, e.g. count vs mass noun.¹⁹ In the next section I discuss
26 possible classifications for the nouns that occur in the pseudo-partitive construction in the 1400s-
27 1500s and the difficulties and overlaps of these classifications.
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39 4.4. Classes of nouns occurring in the pseudo-partitive construction 40 41 42

43 In order to explain the compatibility of *algo* with nouns in the pseudo-partitive construction it is
44 important to understand the properties of the nouns that appear in such collocations. As we saw
45 above, we may initially classify them as abstract nouns. However, this classification fails to
46 capture more general features shared by these nouns.
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53 ¹⁹ As Bosque points out, "[C]asi siempre que llamamos *abstracto* a un sustantivo estamos
54 considerando alguna otra propiedad o interpretación suya que se puede definir
55 independentemente." (Bosque 1999: 47) The literature on the semantic and syntactic
56 classification of nouns is vast and cannot be reviewed in this paper. Hence, I will present some of
57 the criteria and problems with the definition of abstract nouns mentioned by Bosque (1999), who
58 presents an overview of the theoretical points as well as of its relevance for Spanish. The reader
59 is referred to that chapter and references therein for further information.
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4 In this section we will discuss the nominal properties in more detail; the nouns found in the
5 pseudo-partitive construction with *algo* behave like mass nouns with respect to divisibility;
6 portions of ‘doubt’ are doubt (Krifka 1992). These nouns denote properties that are gradable (for
7 example, they are compatible with degree modifiers, e.g. *mucha suavidad*) and can be relativized
8 to different standards; what qualifies as ‘smoothness’ can vary according to the context and to
9 the entity who judges or evaluates. In this respect, these nouns behave like relative adjectives
10 (see Section 2) and a comparison with the adjectives co-occurring with *algo* during the 1400s
11 show correspondences between nouns and adjectives with respect to the criteria for adjective
12 classification presented above. This relation will be explored below, in Section 4.5.
13
14

15 In order to capture the cross-classification of nouns needed for Spanish, Bosque (1999)
16 adopts the proposal from Jackendoff (1991), which will be followed here. The classification of
17 nouns relies on two binary features, boundedness (B) and internal structure (I). Boundedness has
18 long been used to show that the distinction between count and mass noun is paralleled in the
19 domain of eventualities, namely between bounded events vs processes (Bach 1986). For
20 example, a noun like *apple* is bounded because one cannot divide its referent up and still obtain
21 something that can be called “apple”, but with a mass noun like *water*, the referent may be
22 divided up and the result is still describable as water (up to a molecular level). Plurals and mass
23 nouns pattern together with respect to this feature (Jackendoff 1991). The second feature pertains
24 to “necessary entailment about internal structure” (Jackendoff 1991: 20); while for group entities
25 it is entailed that they are composed of members, an individual “may have a decomposition into
26 parts, but that is not a necessary part of its individuality” (1991: 20). The possible combinations
27 are given in (31), from Bosque (1999: 58, [67]):
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- 45
46 (31)a. [+D –I]: individuals.
47
48 b. [+D +I]: groups.
49
50 c. [–D –I]: substances.
51
52 d. [–D +I]: sums.
53
54

55 In the corpus, we find the following examples of each class: nouns that display boundedness and
56 have no internal structure (like *cuervo*, *aver*, *viso*, *heredad*, *arma*), nouns that denote groups
57 containing smaller elements (*flota*), nouns that are unbounded and do not have internal structure
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(e.g. *materia, humor, agua, arena, provecho, bondad, dulzura*) and nouns that are unbounded and have internal structure (e.g. *letras, bienes*).

Classes of nouns	1200s-1300s (total = 35)	1400s (total = 64)	1500s (total = 195)	1400s-1500s (total = 259)
[+D -I]	66% (N=23)	(N=15)	(N=39)	21% (N=54)
[+D +I]	0	0	(N=4)	1.5% (N=4)
[-D -I]	17% (N=6)	(N=35)	(N=126)	62% (N=161)
[-D +I]	17% (N=6)	(N=14)	(N=26)	15.4% (N=40)

Table 4: Percentage of classes of nouns following the sequence *algo de* (searching by collocates with a 3-word window on the CdE; results of the search were manually corrected).

A comparison between the two periods shows an increase in the compatibility of *algo de* with nouns that display the feature “unbounded”, and to be exact, with mass nouns, i.e. nouns that display homogeneous reference, and may occur with other degree modifiers like *mucho* (Krifka 1992, Sánchez López 1999). These nouns denote “una entidad medible” ‘a measureable entity’ (Bosque 1999).²⁰

A closer look at the data shows that there may be further sub-classes within this category, and the difficulty resides in relying just on one distinction.²¹ Besides the count/mass distinction, there are other shared features among the nouns in the corpus examples. The examples from the 1400s show several examples of nouns denoting gradable properties, and in several cases we observe the possibility of substitution by adjectives (e.g. *algo de vermejo, algo de vermejura; algo de agro*):

(32) ...saluo que tengan algo de agro segun la qualidad de los manjares. (CdE, 1400s)

²⁰ With mass nouns that denote unbounded substances, you can still relate it to a measure interpretation:

(i) Instillare. es poco a poco & gota a gota infundir algo de humor. (1400)

²¹ According to the divisions proposed by Bosque, the nouns that are relevant for our construction are mostly in the class of the “abstractos no contables” (Bosque 1999: 49), i.e. abstract mass nouns.

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4 ‘except if they have a bit of bitterness according to the quality of the foods’
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8 It is easy to see how these examples may induce a reanalysis for the degree interpretation of
9 *algo*; this involves the processes of rebracketing and recategorization, where [*algo de*] is
10 analyzed as a unit and as a modifier of the nominal or adjectival head.
11
12

13 If we compare the classes of nouns discussed with the categories proposed by Doetjes
14 and presented on Table 2 above, we see a distinction between classes of “gradable nominal
15 predicates” (like *dulzura*) and mass nouns (substances like *agua*). We prefer to focus here on the
16 feature “unbounded” and to identify other elements that the nouns found in the pseudo-partitive
17 construction have in common: they are deadjectival, and their meaning derives from adjectives
18 that are gradable. Besides the morphological relation of derivation (*vermejo/vermejura*;
19 *dulce/dulzura*; *suave/suavidad*; *grande/grandeza*) we also find corpus data in which the
20 corresponding adjective is used in the same construction, as is the case for *vermejo* and
21 *vermejura*, as shown in (33) and (34), from the 1400s:
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- 31
32 (33) en la carne / que tiene algo / o mucho de vermejo / en los lugares conuenientes: significa
33 dominio de colera bermeja
34 ‘in the meat/ that has *algo* / or a lot of red / in the appropriate places: it means control of
35 the red wrath’
36
37
38 (34) y si esta tal se colligere en los riñones: sera çitrina con algo de vermejura. (Cura de la
39 piedra)
40 ‘and if this one accumulates in the kidneys: it will be greenish-yellow with *algo* of
41 redness’
42
43
44

45 In fact, in (33) it is not clear whether *vermejo* should be classified as a noun or an adjective. It is
46 worth noticing that in these examples we find color terms. The status of adjectives denoting color
47 as gradable adjectives has been debated. There are multiple restrictions on the distribution of
48 “adjetivos de color y forma” (see Demonte 1999 for discussion). Additionally, it has also been
49 noted that color nouns allow for multiple classifications. Alcina y Blecua (1975) classify color
50 nouns as “continuos”, i.e. mass nouns (for further discussion, see, Bosque 1999: 67).
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56 Rodríguez Ramalle (2001) points out that the classes of mass nouns that allow for
57 broader degree modification are “los nombres continuos que denotan sensaciones que
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experimenta o sufre un sujeto...y nombres deverbales ... que expresan estados” [‘mass nouns that denote sensaciones that a subject feels or undergoes...and deverbal nouns...that express states’, my translation] (2001: 34). These are precisely the classes of nouns that we find in the pseudo-partitive construction with *algo* in the 1400s. In both cases, the classes of nouns denote gradable properties, and they are associated with particular scales.

These nouns denote unbounded gradable properties with a similar structure to that of totally open scales, as those proposed for adjectives. The gradable nature of nouns has been amply discussed both in the literature on logic and psychology (for a recent overview, see Sassoon 2013). The data from the 1400s and 1500s regarding the collocations of *algo de* provide diachronic evidence for this connection, while showing that some classes of nouns may be more prone to gradable modification than others.

In fact, it is possible to find other examples of degree modification of these nouns in the corpus, as in (35) and (36):

- (35) ... muy más meritorio y perfecto y después obrarlo con más suavidad y descanso? (CdE, 1500s)
‘...much more commendable and perfect, and then do it with more smoothness and rest?’
- (36) ...para hurtar tanta dulzura; (CdE, 1500s)
‘in order to steal so much sweetness’

The similarity between this class of nouns and adjectives can clearly be seen by the interpretation obtained in exclamatives. While (37) expresses a high degree of the property *smoothness*, just like the corresponding sentence with the adjective *suave* ‘smooth’ in (37’), a count noun like *silla* ‘chair’ would not yield the same interpretation.

- (37) ¡Qué suavidad!
(37’) ¡Qué suave!
(38) ¡Qué silla! ‘What a chair!’

Rather, (38) may be used to refer to size or to a certain degree of a property generally associated with chairs, but would not be used to express a high degree of “being a chair”.

To conclude, in this section we have considered some possible criteria for the classification of the nouns that collocate with *algo* in the pseudo-partitive construction. While this classification proves complex given the lack of a single criterion that will entirely capture the behavior of these nouns, several distributional tests show the similarities between the nouns found in this construction and gradable adjectives. In the next section I will concentrate on the co-occurrence of *algo* with adjectives and verbs during the same periods.

4.5 *Algo* as a modifier of adjectives and verbs

In the 1400s we already find *algo* in collocations with adjectives that are either evaluative (*algo antojadizo* ‘a bit capricious’, *algo turbada* ‘a bit upset’, *algo piadosa* ‘a bit compassionate’, *algo buena* ‘a bit good’) or dimensional (*algo angosto* ‘a bit narrow’, *algo viscosa* ‘a bit viscous’, *algo mollificada* ‘a bit soft’, *algo costosa* ‘a bit costly’), using Bierwisch terms (from Demonte 2011). These adjectives are gradable but they may differ in scale structure according to the criteria presented in Section 3. What they have in common is that they are either relative or partial adjectives; they rule out modifiers targeting a maximum degree of a property:

(39) **completamente antojadizo/buena/ angosto/costosa*.

(40) **casi antojadizo/buena/angosto/costosa*

The adverbs *completamente* ‘completely’ and *casi* ‘almost’ require a maximum value on the relevant property scale; none of the adjectives above is associated with a scale which has an endpoint (differently, for example, from an adjective like *limpio*, where the maximum degree of cleanliness can be defined by the total absence of dirt). Additionally, the meaning of these adjectives also depends on a comparison class.

As for verbs, in the 1400s all the instances of *algo* modifying verbs display deadjectival verbs whose interpretation involves the increase or decrease of a gradable property, typically lexicalized in an adjective which may be part of their semantic representation (see Bosque & Masullo 1996 for a formal proposal), like *aflojar* ‘tornar flojo, hacer más flojo’, *bajar* ‘volverse más bajo’, as in (41), *acercar* ‘hacer cercano’ (as in [20] above). These verbs denote unbounded

processes²² and in this respect can be seen as semantically similar to the open scales introduced by the lexical meaning of the adjectives just mentioned. The difference between such adjectives and this class of verbs is that in the case of the latter a bound may be contextually provided (for example, for the verb in [41], if one explicitly mentioned the lowest level attained for the sea level). However, in that case the predicate would not be compatible with *algo*; crucially, it is the atelic nature of the aspectual periphrasis *ir + gerund* in (41) that provides the aspectual structure which is similar to an open scale:

- (41) todavía la mar era altísima, aunque iba algo baxándose. (CdE, 1400s)
'The sea was still very deep, although it was getting a bit lower'

Verbs like *aflojar* 'to slow, to decrease', *bajar* 'to lower' or *acercar* 'to bring closer' denote events of gradual change of state, i.e. a change in a scalar value undergone by the participant in an event, like the sea in (41) (Hay et al., 1999). In order to measure the amount of change undergone by the participant in an event, we must refer to an increase or a decrease in a scalar value of a dimension. If we consider the relation between these predicates and the types of scales presented in section 3, we can see that *algo* combines with verbal predicates that entail at least a minimum value of a measurable dimension.

To sum up, the categories modified by *algo* that are found in the data from the 1400s – qualificational adjectives, unbounded nouns and gradual change of state verbs – display a common feature that allows for degree modification. What they have in common is that their lexical semantics introduces a property that allows for measurement along a scale. While this connection with gradability may be clearer for adjectives and nouns, as we have seen the modification of gradual change of state verbs pertains to the property which is determined by the lexical semantics of the verb, i.e. the adverb targets the gradable “core” of the verb meaning (Bosque and Masullo 1998).

Although the modification depends on the specific properties of the lexical category collocating with *algo* (and as we have seen, modification of nouns requires a pseudo-partitive construction), in all the cases *algo* targets a gradable property associated with the semantics of

²² Paradis (2001) considers “unboundedness” to be the relevant property that connects verbs, adjectives, and nouns with respect to gradability.

the modified element. In the next section I discuss the specific mechanisms that underlie this modification.

5. A combination of structural and pragmatic factors

The reanalysis of *algo* as a degree modifier involves a change in constituency and hierarchical structure, as represented in (42):

(42) [_{DP} *algo* [_{PP} *de DP*]] > [_{XP} [_{DegP} *algo de*] [_{XP}]]

Since the 1400s, *algo* becomes a modifier that is compatible with adjectives, nouns, and verbs. As shown in the previous sections, the distribution of *algo* as a pronoun relates to the distribution of the emerging adverbial category, as its occurrence in partitive and pseudo-partitive constructions (which was allowed by its quantificational nature) created an ambiguity that led to a reanalysis of these structures.

I argue that this change was triggered both by structural factors and by pragmatic enrichment. With respect to the former, pseudo-partitives constructions containing unbounded nouns were structurally ambiguous, as detailed above. As for the latter, the quantity and ignorance implicatures associated with the indefinite pronoun favored the emergence of the degree interpretation. As argued above, the two types of factors must be taken into account in order to understand this change: structural reanalysis is often motivated by and intertwined with pragmatic enrichment, as inferences triggered in language use influence parsing decisions and may lead to relabeling and recategorization. This is particularly relevant for the case of indefinite pronouns, whose cross-linguistic developments often result from the conventionalization of conversational implicatures (Harpelmath 1997).

Finally, it should be pointed out that the reanalysis of *algo* as a degree modifier was arguably favored by the existence of a similar structure in Spanish. Although in the process of reanalysis an innovative structure, not previously attested in the language, may eventually be created, in this case there was also a syntactic-semantic template for degree words that had similarities with the constructions in which *algo* occurred.

In medieval and classical Spanish we find structures containing the preposition *de* followed by a noun (with mass nouns or plural nouns) both as complements of verbs and complements of quantifiers (Camus Bergareche, 2009; Keniston, 1937; Beberfall, 1952):

(43) dadnos del agua (*Cid*, 2798)
 give-IMP-2PL us of the water
 ‘Give us some water’ (partitive interpretation)

(44) fecho muchas de veces
 done many of times
 ‘Done many times’

(45) tienen bastante de comida
 have-PRES-3PL plenty of food
 ‘(They) have plenty of food’

Although these constructions are sometimes called “partitive” in the literature (e.g. see Camus Bergareche 2009), it is more accurate to consider them pseudo-partitive according to the formal criteria presented above. The presence of this pattern in the language since as early as the 13th c. could have provided a model favoring the development of *algo* as a degree modifier. Note, however, that the classes of nouns that occur earlier in the collocation with *algo* are different from the ones we find in examples (43)-(45), which are mass nouns and plural nouns.

From the point of view of the diachronic mechanisms involved in this change, it is important to point out that the existence of a possible analogic relation does not prevent reanalysis. Crucially, reanalysis and analogy are not incompatible, as discussed e.g. in Harris and Campbell (1995: 367). Rather, the consideration of similar patterns present in Spanish (and Romance more generally) that may have played a role in the interpretation of a structurally ambiguous sequence allows us to better contextualize and understand how individual changes interact with broader tendencies in a language.

6. The diachronic change of *algo*: reassessing the continuum proposed by Doetjes

The evidence from the diachronic corpus of Spanish confirms that the first three categories in the continuum - gradable adjectives, gradable nominal predicates and gradable verbs - are attested in the earlier occurrences of *algo* as a degree modifier. The corpus data do not allow us to establish a chronological order among them (i.e. *algo* with adjectives occurring prior to *algo* with gradable nominal predicates, for example), as we find examples of the three categories in the 1400s. With respect to the nouns that accept modification by *algo*, in terms of the distinction between IIa and IV, in the pseudo-partitive construction we find both gradable nominal predicates like *dulzura* and mass nouns like *mirra*, *arena*. However, it should be pointed out that in our data *mirra* is the only mass noun that collocates with *algo de* in the 1400s, while in the 1500s we find several mass nouns in this construction (e.g. *arena*, *materia*, *harina*, *sudor*, *plata*),²³ so there seems to be a chronological precedence of gradable nominal categories over mass nouns. More data would be needed to confirm this tendency. Given the specific syntactic restrictions of nouns, their co-occurrence with *algo* required a specific construction (pseudo-partitive) and is possible only with certain classes of nouns, as determined by their semantics. The interpretation of these nouns crucially refers to a property; they have scales with no lower or upper bound, and in this respect they resemble the scales of relative adjectives.

As for category III, it is possible to find in the data some instances of comparatives occurring with *algo* as an adverb, after the 1500s, as in (46) and (47):

(46) podría recibir lícitamente un precio algo mayor (CdE, 1500s)
 ‘(he/she) could legitimately receive a slightly higher price’

(47) ... y algo más fría por estar más arrimada á la cordillera de los Andes (CdE, 1500-1600s)
 ‘and a bit colder because it is closer to the Andes mountain range’

²³ Some examples of *algo* with mass nouns in the 1500s are the following:

- (i) las mañanas cuando hace algo de frío sacudan la hortaliza (CdE, 1500s)
- (ii) Es asimismo buena señal si hay algo de rocío, o está la yerba más verde allí que en otra parte enderredor, (CdE, 1500s)

In the data, there are later instances of modification of a syntactic category not contained in Doetjes's model, namely prepositions. Both examples below display *algo* as a modifier of the preposition *antes*²⁴ (which may select for a nominal or a clausal complement):

(48) ... y si los quieren llevar fuera córtelos algo antes que estén maduros que ellos madurarán después (CdE, 1500s)

‘...and if you want to take them, it is advisable to cut them a little bit before they become ripe as they will ripen later’

(49) Llegué a Granada otro día, algo antes de anoecer, (CdE, 1600s)

‘I arrived in Granada on another day, a little bit before sunset’

In these examples, *algo* can be paraphrased by ‘a bit’ and it can only have an adverbial interpretation, as the distribution observed in these examples is ruled out for the indefinite pronoun. Both the examples with comparatives and with prepositions occur after the 1500s. This evidence suggests that it may be desirable to extend Doetjes' model to include prepositions.

7. Conclusion

This paper has focused on the mechanisms of syntactic and semantic change involved in the development of the degree modifier *algo* from an indefinite pronoun meaning ‘something’. Specifically, it has analyzed the relation between the distribution of the pronoun in the 1400s-1500s and the emergence of the degree modifier, as *algo* becomes compatible with a range of categories that allow for a gradable interpretation. The focus has been on the properties of the lexical categories that *algo* co-occurs with and on the role of pseudo-partitive constructions in the reanalysis of the indefinite pronoun.

Building on the types of scales and standards introduced by Kennedy and McNally (2005) and Paradis (2001), similarities between adjectives, nouns and verbs have been identified. Hence, this paper integrates language-specific facts (specifically, the use of *de* with degree

²⁴ It has been argued that across languages *before* is semantically a comparative with a meaning roughly equivalent to ‘earlier than’ (cf. Del Prete 2008 for Italian), which would suggest that these examples should be treated on a par with the instances of modification of comparatives.

expressions in the history of Spanish and the properties of pseudo-partitives in this language) with general properties of gradable expressions as they are manifested cross-linguistically.

I have also discussed the nature of the mechanisms involved in this change, in particular the combination of structural and pragmatic factors in the reanalysis of *algo*. I have argued that both the structural ambiguity obtained when *algo* occurred in the pseudo-partitive construction and the quantity and ignorance implicatures generated by the indefinite pronoun (as an element of a Horn scale) have contributed to its reanalysis as a degree modifier. Other studies have considered the diachronic connection between indefinites and free-choice as well as modal meanings (Haspelmath 1997, Aguilar-Guevara 2010, among others). To my knowledge, this is the first diachronic study that tackles the semantic and pragmatic properties of an indefinite pronoun (in particular, the range of implications that this class of pronouns is known to trigger cross-linguistically) in their relation to degree interpretations.

The combinatorial possibilities of *algo* in the history of Spanish reflect to a great extent the synchronic continuum of categories proposed by Doetjes (2008) for degree modifiers across languages. The data confirm the contiguity of lexical categories with respect to scalar structure from a diachronic perspective, hence providing yet another source of evidence for the cross-categorical nature of gradability.

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